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# SUPER-DEMOCRACY

BY BENJAMIN IVES GILMAN

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“For friendship we believe to be the greatest good of states.”—Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 4. “The secret of government, let me tell you, lies in kindly feeling.”—Ieyasu, in conversation, 1616.

SUPPOSE a number of persons bent on a purpose demanding effort from all. By whom shall the decisions be made which shall carry it out?

Democracy proposes that they shall be made by a majority among those of the number who possess certain qualifications for control acquiesced in by every one. It is, therefore, not just to democracy to call it a government by count of noses. It is a government by count of superior noses—a different thing, since these are a selection by grace, theoretically, of the total number concerned.

It is a weak point in democratic theory that this proposal may fail to utilize the capacity of citizens to the best advantage. As an undertaking becomes more complex the qualifications for the best management of its parts become different from those demanded for the best management of the whole. The parts would be more successfully handled by persons specially chosen than by any choice of persons based on general capacity. The question arises whether the advantage to the enterprise of this more skilful handling of its parts, or spheres, each by itself, may not be greater than the advantage of their combined control from one source. This question may present itself in two forms. A given sphere in the enterprise may concern only part of the citizenship. Or, concerning them all, it may concern them independently of the rest of the enterprise; that is, no decision in that sphere may prevent any decision as to other affairs, and *vice versa*.

Answering either form of the question in the affirmative, the constitution of a democracy would divide the ultimate

control of the State. In the first case, the voting class for the sphere in question will be formed from the citizens concerned only. In the second case, it will be formed from the whole citizenship, but by applying different tests. In either case, instead of one voting class, or sovereign people, there will be two, or it may be more, voting classes, or sovereign peoples, each exercising sovereignty within limits laid down in the constitution. A *plures* of voting classes will be formed out of the *unum* which pursues the common end.

The political scheme thus developed is two degrees removed from a government by count of noses. The first step, to one governing electorate, forms a democracy. The second, to several such electorates, forms what may be called a super-democracy. Super-democracy is multiple popular sovereignty. Of its two forms, the first, which provides for the separate control of matters touching some only of the citizenship, may be called federal super-democracy; the second, which provides for the separate control of matters touching all, but in independent ways, may be called internal super-democracy.

Federal super-democracy, foreshadowed in many alliances between independent states in Europe from Greek times, was signally illustrated in the structure of the American Union. In their own affairs the electorates of the individual States are sovereign; in certain specified affairs of general moment, the combined electorates of all, or the voting citizenship of the United States.

Internal super-democracy contemplates a closer union of authorities. The sovereigns sit side by side, ruling the same people by different rights. The classical instance is the alliance of spiritual and temporal power. Suppose a community of persons united in the pursuit of the common weal in both affairs of the soul and affairs of the body. Such a community may intrust the ultimate control of the two to one authority, the State becoming a Church State, and the Church a State Church. This condition has been approximately illustrated throughout European history. Or, ultimate control may be vested in two authorities, Church and State forming a union in the American sense, under a constitution assigning mutually exclusive limits to the two sovereignties. In Dante's vision Europe was to yield allegiance to such a dual system. The Pope and the Emperor were to be the two sources of authority, each ultimate be-

cause dealing with affairs outside the sphere of the other. Of this compound body politic, or idealized Holy Roman Empire, Dante's programme was the informal constitution, defining the qualifications of one ruler in terms of a priestly succession, and of the other in terms of an imperial line. Applied within the political sphere, and under democracy, the principle would establish various special tests giving the right to vote within special independent spheres, leaving other affairs to the already existing electorate. The right of suffrage would become several rights, individual citizens enjoying one or more, according to their varying qualifications. The State would be governed through a multiple vote, each electorate deciding for the whole population, as a team of horses is controlled through a double set of reins, each hand guiding all.

In practice, the mutually exclusive limitations of sovereignty which are the distinguishing mark of super-democracy, either federal or internal, demand perpetual definition. An essential feature of any super-democratic government is a permanent means of interpreting the universal will in this respect as it is laid down in the Constitution. Such a means is provided in the United States by the Supreme Court, which possesses a paramount judicial right—that of deciding between sovereign States by interpreting a verbal definition of their separate powers. Under internal super-democracy, each sovereign State would possess a like tribunal for the interpretation of limits of jurisdiction constitutionally established among the new union of powers within it.

The success of the federal system in the Government of the United States has had its share in developing home rule the world over. The principle concerned is not that of local self-government. It is not the delegation of power by an authority constituted with the right to resume it; but an assignment of power by a Constitution, irrevocable except through amendment by theoretical consent of the entire population. Our Union provides for local independence, within limits interpreted by a court.

An all-important application is open to federal super-democracy. In world politics federation offers the only hope of peace. To obviate a conflict of powers, either the authority of one must prevail over the rest, or limits must be assigned by all to the authority of each. The first alternative is

either repellent or ridiculous. If domination by a single race be supposed attained by force of arms, it proposes a revolting waste of most of the material of civilization. If by peaceful means, the plan is absurd in view of the enormous disproportion between the problems presented by all peoples and the capacities of any one. A federal union of powers is the only practicable issue of international affairs. The nations of the world must eventually come to an agreement regarding their territorial limits, and agree also to abide by the decision of an international supreme court, like the tribunal of The Hague, in the interpretation of their jurisdiction. Were their union restricted to these two agreements, none would yield any existing sovereignty. Each would hold, by consent of all, the right of ultimate control over certain independent means to the common end of civilization. Until in the opinion of some one this right was abused by some other, none of their energy would be devoted to mutual destruction. There will be war among men whenever any are willing to attempt what others would rather die than permit; and there ought to be war whenever any willing that others should live their way are forbidden to live their own. What is needed between nations, and what would be supplied by their federal union, is an agreement to live and let live.

Has internal super-democracy also a place in politics? It would but reapply a fundamental canon of democracy, which the federal system has already transcended. Democracy proposes that a selection from those concerned in given affairs shall control them; the federal system that no one who is not concerned shall control them. Has the democratic canon—that qualifications agreed to by all give a part the right to control all—its share also in political development? Is this a germinal principle? Should the final power of the people be specialized as well as localized?—desynthesized as well as decentralized?

Three facts of current democratic politics point toward this course.

The weak point in democratic theory has plainly shown itself in practice. Existing democracy admittedly fails to utilize the political capacity of citizens to the best advantage. Throughout our Union the voting classes are assuming direct control of government with a view to better service in public affairs. Direct primary action, direct election of

Senators, the initiative, referendum, and recall are methods chosen. Internal super-democracy would propose instead that citizens should divide the control of government with a view to a better mastery over public affairs. The great obstacle is private interest. The multiple vote would seek to call intelligence to the aid of public spirit in the fight against greed. With special spheres in charge of special capacity the political duties remaining would in turn be brought within the general capacity left in their control. At present the one electorate finds a threatening antagonist in ignorant or selfish wealth. Democracy tends toward plutocracy. Where political power is equal, riches become the sole form of superiority to which all must defer. A multiple vote, by making special capacity also a power to which all must defer, would challenge the prestige as well as the power of money.

Second, in the course of the movement for direct popular government in some of our Western States, a kind of special capacity is already liberating itself within the present single suffrage. It is reported that the burden of the initiative and referendum is so great that only those vote upon a given question who have some particular interest in it. This is in itself rough-and-ready super-democracy. The ultimate decision in these questions is given, not by the whole electorate, but by partial electorates spontaneously developed from it. Internal super-democracy would legitimize this condition; placing certain public affairs now at times *de facto* in the hands of those most interested, *de jure* in the hands accounted most competent.

Third, one type of multiple suffrage is already widely established by law. Voters on school questions are often a different class from those controlling other matters, by the addition of women. The two sexes together are deemed more competent within this sphere than men alone. The special electorate includes the general electorate in this case; but were only married women added, as has been suggested, and single men subtracted, neither body of voters would include the other, and the multiple suffrage would be illustrated in its normal form.

Pursuing this development, the control of the defense of a State might be reserved to those able to bear arms or otherwise take part in war; control in questions affecting paid labor to employers and employed, including self-supporting

minors; control in questions of public health or of legal procedure to persons passing tests of knowledge of these subjects; control in questions of trade, finance, or agriculture to persons concerned in these pursuits. The sphere reserved to the general electorate would include the decision of those broader matters and the choice of those more conspicuous officers in which experience indicates that the wider the basis of suffrage the wiser the action. The partition of sovereignty within an internal union according to this or any other plan would be matter for a discussion supplementary to the explanation and defense of our existing Federal Union given in the *Federalist* of 1788.

A representative assembly chosen under internal super-democracy would consist of members in different standing. The groups chosen by each electorate would be comparable to the permanent committees of our present legislatures, excepting that they would be chosen to their limited office not by colleagues but the people; would deliberate in public and would legislate. The reference of questions from the whole body to one or another group would be advisory only and subject, if disputed, to the decision of a supreme court.

A compromise is possible which would look toward the multiple suffrage without actually introducing it. All persons passing a test of special fitness for the management of a certain branch of public affairs might be given one or more additional votes in this branch. These voters would tend to control it unless the rest of the electorate were interested to combine against their opinion. In so far the arrangement would illustrate a familiar maxim of business administration—"Choose subordinates well and leave them free." The general electorate of a State by amendment to its Constitution would choose plural voters for their fitness to perform special duties, and would leave them for the most part free, retaining the opportunity of fiat and veto over their acts as subordinates. Such a scheme might be introduced experimentally for a term of years; and were it to prove successful and the fiat and veto of the general electorate to prove unnecessary, full super-democracy would be its natural successor.

The establishment of a multiple suffrage promises three collateral advantages.

First, the debate over votes for women would be shifted to new ground. For the question—Shall women have the

vote?—would be substituted the question—What votes shall women have? Since the identical question would be asked concerning men, the factor of sex would disappear from the discussion, save as one element of fitness like another.

Again, a multiple suffrage would contribute to solve the problem of the undeveloped and unassimilated elements of our population: the African race in the South and alien immigration elsewhere. The political power of both being less, it would offer less danger and provoke less debate and fewer defensive measures.

A multiple suffrage would, finally, tend to lighten the burden of the individual voter, already heavy and certain to increase. The ballot grows longer from two causes. Its scope is becoming at once more direct and more extensive. Governmental control is reaching over more and more matters hitherto independently managed. Every such addition to the functions of the State transfers to ultimate decision by the ballot a sphere hitherto reserved to private choice. Socialism, never before so widely or so boldly advocated, would make the process complete so far as productive wealth is concerned. Like Frankenstein, society to-day debates whether it can curb, or whether it must destroy the monster to which it has given life, and which has never ceased to prey upon its creator. To abolish private property in all instruments of production, as Socialism proposes, would be to add to the scope of the vote a mass of affairs more multifarious even than all it now controls. The goal may never be reached, but progress toward it is certain. Some way of lessening the responsibilities of voting citizens is imperatively demanded. Internal super-democracy offers a way by proposing that they share political duty between them.

Under super-democracy government reverts to control by classes. But they are not classes like the *Etats Généraux* of European history, founded in part on birth or ecclesiastical rank. They are classes like those of our sports, formed to the satisfaction of all by ratings based on experience of the specific affairs concerned. In this contrast lies the whole distinction between aristocracy and democracy. Aristocracy forbids and democracy demands that the qualifications for authority should be capable of statement in abstract terms, and without naming individuals. Aristocracy



respects persons; democracy, qualities. Aristocracy says, "Blood will tell"; Democracy answers, "Let it, then"; the one offering credit, the other demanding cash. To respect a person is to infer merit from another in some way connected with him; to respect qualities is to find merit in himself. Aristocracy consists in wearing borrowed finery; democracy, in keeping to one's own. Aristocracy assumes; democracy tests. The initial generality of our Declaration of Independence glitters with radiance from beyond the political sphere. The words "All men are created equal" announce that righteous government does not make exceptions, but proceeds by the invariable application of rules. The doctrine of equality appears in the claim of the prophet Ezekiel that reward and punishment should follow not personality, but merit and fault; and in the reported injunction of his contemporary Lao-tze, "Do not value the man, value the man's abilities." It reappears in the classical definition of liberty as that political condition in which no person is above the law. Forbidding alike the assignment of rank or the proscription of race, it demands that every preference shall be based on fact. But to conceive that it demands that no preference be shown is a double blunder. The belief that one man is as good as another at anything is a pseudo-democracy, at once the caricature and the contradiction of the veritable doctrine of equality. It is a caricature, for the doctrine is not the absurd statement that all men are of like capacity, but the weighty principle that men seen to be of like capacity are to be treated alike. Men are to be held equal until experience proves them unequal. Not their different rating is the condemnable thing, but their vicarious rating. It is, furthermore, a contradiction, for democratic practice, far from rejecting the different rating of men, is founded upon it. Democracy begins by the selection of a voting class from among the governed by accepted tests of fitness to control. A government by classes such as super-democracy proposes is not the abandonment of democratic practice, but its rational pursuit under democratic principle.

The aim pursued is the best use of special capacity for the common weal. Democracy recognizes general capacity alone, trusting that it in turn will recognize special capacity. Super-democracy recognizes special capacity directly; not only opens a career to talent, as Napoleon is reported to

have said of the French Revolution, but insures a career to various forms of it. In so doing it provides a remedy for what is at once a defect of democracy practically manifest, and theoretically its only defect. Super-democracy is democracy perfected; political authority ideally exercised.

What are the marks of this ideal? Authority is exercised whenever one person chooses to do something because another chooses he shall. But freedom consists in doing what one chooses to do oneself. Is not any authority its denial, and ideal government a contradiction in terms? So philosophical anarchy holds, but only by overlooking plain facts. Authority is not only the power to compel, but the power to impel; not only the power to reward and punish, but the power to guide. Suppose what another chooses to have me do I would have chosen to do myself, could I have conceived the plan? If I do it, I am free, since I am doing what I now want; and I am also under authority, since I am doing it because another has chosen that I shall. The case is possible, indeed is actual in myriads of instances round the globe every day. Freedom and authority coalesce therein. A single act illustrates both. This is the ideal of the Hebrew Psalmist "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy commandments." It is the ideal of Dante's line, "*In la sua voluntade è nostra pace*," and of the English ascription, "Whose service is perfect freedom." Involved in such service are two things: an aim common to governor and governed; and a belief on the part of the governed that the governor can direct the accomplishment of that aim better than the governed himself. The marks of ideal authority are two, expressible in the two words, unity and capacity. Democracy gives unity; it presupposes the consent of the governed to the aim of the government. But it does not use capacity; it fails to secure the consent of the governed to the means of the government. They do not serve the State in perfect freedom, but in part because they must. Super-democracy, by dividing ultimate power, utilizes the capacity of citizens to the best advantage, and thus secures a government by the complete consent of the governed.

According to Aristotle, happiness is the sign of inward perfection, as a glowing cheek is the sign of health. The happiness of a State, the sign of its inward perfection, is friendship between its citizens. This it is that gives the body politic the glow of health. Super-democracy alone

affords friendship a political basis; and by this sign, as well as by the perfect freedom of its service, is approved as the political ideal.

The three forms of popular government—democracy, federal super-democracy, and internal super-democracy—involve a progressive change in the feelings of individual citizens toward one another. All popular government presupposes sympathy of purpose between governors and governed. The total population is assumed to be animated by a common love of country. Further, a democracy is composed of a class of persons with equal authority and a residuum having none. Such a scheme affords ground for respect from any disfranchised person toward any enfranchised person, but no ground for respect between voters. Under federal super-democracy this condition is changed. The voters have no longer identical power. A given voter may not share the whole sphere of command possessed by a given other—to be sure by exception of matters which do not concern him. Nevertheless, a certain ground for respect between voters is inherent in the arrangement. In the United States, a Missourian possesses a sovereign power—namely, over Missouri affairs—denied a Pennsylvanian, and *vice versa*. The voters of Switzerland exercise like cantonal rights. Federal super-democracy provides at least a foothold for mutual respect. Internal super-democracy does more. Here the different authority of different voters may be exercised over one another. In general each of the different electorates would come to contain individuals not included in others. All persons so placed would find themselves governors, in one matter, of persons by whom they were governed in some other. They would have cause to feel reciprocally, not a remote respect for authority they did not share, but which also did not concern them, but an immediate respect for authority over themselves.

These conditions are those of friendship. Friendship is based on community of aim and difference of capacity in its pursuit. The conditions are three: sameness of purpose between two persons; respect of one for some superiority of the other in its achievement; and the return of respect for some different superiority by the other. Friends are alike at heart and complements in head and hand. Helpers and not competitors, the powers of each have for the other the charm of the *ignotum* held *pro magnifico*.

Democratic theory, beside illustrating the first condition of friendship, sympathy of purpose, illustrates also, in the relation of the disfranchised to the enfranchised, the second. But under democracy the third condition of friendship—a reciprocal acknowledgment of superior capacity in the use of means toward the common end—has no political basis. The return of respect for political authority first becomes possible, in however unimpressive a way, within a union of sovereign States. Federal super-democracy alone among forms of government sows the seeds of friendship between citizens. Finally, under internal super-democracy, friendship receives a basis not only seen, but felt. Respect becomes not only reciprocal, but vital. The seeds of friendship are not only sown, but quickened into life. The necessary mutual respect of many rulers provides a permanent source of kindly feeling throughout the State.<sup>1</sup>

Unless all political omens fail, Demos will finally go his way with other kings. The United States took the first step in super-democracy. When sovereignty was shared instead of centered among them, unity, capacity, and amity became the bases of the national life. The gay geometry of our flag expresses more than a comparison between our present and our past. In its blue heaven, above the red and white of parted cloud, appears a symbol of the perfect State—consisting not of planets round a sun, but of self-luminous stars.

<sup>1</sup> *Note.* The inability of democracy to utilize the political capacity of citizens is the theme of M. Emile Faguet's brilliant and profound book *Le Culte de l'Incompétence* (Paris, 1910). The last chapter, "*Le Rêve*," outlines a "*synergie sociale*" altogether in the spirit of super-democracy, and ends with the words "*Amicitia sit!*" M. Faguet writes: "It is essential to give scope to technical competence, to intellectual competence, to moral competence, even if the national sovereignty comes to be limited thereby, and even if equality suffers. . . . What is necessary and always will be necessary is a mixture of aristocracy and democracy. . . . But this mixed constitution should not be a simple juxtaposition, which would only bring hostile elements into contact. I have said mixture, and should have said combination. . . . A healthy State is one in which the aristocracy finds something to admire in the people, and the people in the aristocracy. . . ."

Reading for "aristocracy" the special electorates of super-democracy, and for "the people" the general electorate of democracy, from which they are developed, the outline of M. Faguet recognizes multiple sovereignty as the necessary issue of popular government, and finds in the kindly feeling which it implies the sign of social health. Equality would suffer by the change, as M. Faguet notes, but only the counterfeit principle, not the true one.

BENJAMIN IVES GILMAN.